



Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature

By William N. Valavanis

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In this luxurious cloth-bound hardcover with glossy slipcase, renowned botanical photographer Jonathan Singer presents his breathtaking images of the world's most notable bonsai.

In *Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature*, the finest extant achievements in the art of bonsai are seen together for the first time, through the lens of renowned botanical photographer Jonathan Singer. This magnificent volume is the result of an extensive photographic campaign, in the course of which Singer was granted unprecedented access to the most respected public and private collections in Japan and the United States, including the mecca of bonsai, the Omiya Bonsai Village of Saitama, Japan, where photography is normally prohibited. Three hundred stunning full-page images and four lavish gatefolds present bonsai of all types, from quiet representations of nature to bold sculptural forms. The horticultural and aesthetic characteristics of each bonsai are concisely and authoritatively described in the narrative captions by William Valavanis, head of the International Bonsai Arboretum in Rochester, New York. And because the container is considered an integral part of any bonsai—indeed, the literal meaning of “bonsai” is “tray plant”—the book also includes some twenty-five photographs of traditional bonsai containers, with descriptions. A further sequence of twenty-five photographs is devoted to the related art of suiseki, or miniature stone landscapes displayed in the same manner, and often alongside, bonsai.

With his groundbreaking first book, *Botanica Magnifica*, Jonathan Singer established a new style of botanical photography, characterized by an exceptional clarity of detail and richness of color, as well as a painterly chiaroscuro. These qualities are just as evident in the present volume; Singer photographs each bonsai with an artist’s—one might even say a portraitist’s—eye. Whereas most books on bonsai aim to instruct readers on techniques of care and cultivation, Singer’s book takes the reader on a visual journey. His images encompass many different species, from azalea to red maple, as well as a variety of blossoms and fruits. Alluring and serene, Singer's photographs make the experience of leafing through *Bonsai* not unlike entering a real Japanese garden. *Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature* not only documents the masterpieces of an ancient horticultural art, but is a masterpiece in itself.

A portion of the proceeds of this book will benefit the Japanese Red Cross.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Fine Bonsai*:

"With his last book, Jonathan Singer established himself as the Audubon of flowers. Well, one of the most brilliant nature photographers of our generation has done it again. For this amazing volume Singer was granted unprecedented access to some of the world's best bonsai specimens. His portraits capture these botanical masterpieces in all their glory and mystique. Behold the Audubon of Bonsai!" — *David Seideman, Editor-in-Chief, Audubon Magazine*

"This is a dazzling book by one of the world's most gifted photographers." — *Milton Esterow, Publisher, ARTnews*

"This delicate balance between nature and art is even more beguiling when considered through Singer's exquisite photographs." — *ARTnews*

"...Under the eye of renowned photographer Jonathan M. Singer the curious shapes and slightly disorienting scales have found a new context in which to be appreciated." — *Publisher's Weekly*

"Retired podiatrist Jonathan Singer has worked magic in [*Fine*] *Bonsai: Art and Nature*, an elegant album featuring hundreds of full-page images of the miniature potted trees that represent a horticultural art form dating back 2,000 years." — *Audubon Magazine*

"Dr. Singer combined his interest in botany and horticulture with his technical and aesthetic expertise to produce stunning photographs of some of the most extraordinary bonsai in the world. Printed by a chromogenic process, the images take on a three-dimensional appearance that accentuates both their beauty and their usefulness as documentation of this specialized subject." — *Smithsonian Institution Libraries*

"What a bonsai gallery book should strive to be...exceeds my lofty expectations...a book for anyone...I would buy this book in a heartbeat." — *of Bonsai Magazine*

"These are not your traditional images of bonsai...Each tree depicted has its unique character, and the artist has focused on the most beautiful, powerful, evocative or sculptural element in each." — *Golden Statements, magazine of the Golden State Bonsai Federation*

"A book of this caliber should do three things: provide aesthetic beauty, educate the viewer, and spark enthusiasm—new or renewed—for bonsai. *Fine Bonsai* accomplishes all three." — *International Bonsai*

"When I sit down at my desk in Copenhagen and look up, the first and most beautiful thing I see is a spectacular Jonathan Singer photograph of flowers hanging on my wall. It gives me calm when I need a moment to refocus. Having lived in Japan for eighteen years, I had many occasions to enjoy and contemplate the mystery of bonsai, and still do. Jonathan Singer's photographs help unveil that mystery, and provide all of us with the chance to see and contemplate on this ancient art form at any time. Victor Hasselblad founded the company because of his great love for nature photography. If he could see this book, he would be so proud that one of his Hasselblad cameras was the partner of Jonathan Singer to help create such beautiful images."

— Dr. Larry Hansen, Chairman & CEO, Hasselblad

About the Author

Jonathan M. Singer's double-elephant folio of *Botanica Magnifica* is kept in the Cullman Rare Book Room at the Smithsonian Institution Libraries. Dr. Singer was named a Hasselblad Laureate Award winner (2008) and Carl Linnaeus Silver Medalist from the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences (2009) based on his contribution marrying art with science, and to “our perception and appreciation of the botanical world.” His many achievements include his appointment as Research Collaborator, Department of Botany, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

William N. Valavanis has made over fifty trips to Japan where he apprenticed with well-known bonsai artists Kyuzo Murata and Kakutaro Komuro in Omiya Bonsai Village in Japan. He is the proprietor of the International Bonsai Arboretum in Rochester, New York, where he maintains a collection of classical bonsai. His is also the Publisher and Editor of *International BONSAI*.

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Excerpt from *Fine Bonsai*:

Introduction

Bonsai are artistically trained, dwarfed potted plants, usually of woody species. The combination of art and horticulture synergistically creates a unique living art; some bonsai are true abstract art. Derived from two Chinese/Japanese characters, the word *bonsai*, correctly pronounced, “bone-sigh,” can be translated literally as “to plant in a tray.” Imagine, in one container you can enjoy an entire forest of maples or a seaside scene with a rock planting—these are images of bonsai. As people around the globe have embraced the art of bonsai and adapted their styles to their own native species, new forms are being established. This is good for the art of bonsai, allowing expansion and improvement.

The history of bonsai is long and complex; bonsai created in Japan prior to 1800 are thought to have been for the most part imitations of Chinese and Korean bonsai. Gradually, Japanese bonsai became differentiated from those of other countries, and between 1900 and 1950, they developed into something uniquely Japanese that could be clearly distinguished from the bonsai that had existed until that time. Bonsai as we know it today is thus a rather recent form that continues to be refined in Japan and around the world as it expands to other places.

Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature presents the beauty and art of bonsai as captured through the eyes of master photographer Jonathan M. Singer. This world-renowned art photographer is able to see beyond the species and the techniques to find the artistic essence in each bonsai.

This is not a bonsai textbook but rather a photographic collection of fine bonsai that interested Dr. Singer's artistic eye with their foliage, flowers, carved dead wood, roots, bark texture, and other features. Viewers will appreciate the beauty Dr. Singer has highlighted, and some may be inspired to pursue the art. All will surely appreciate the fine composition of the photographs, the printing, and the bonsai's interesting stories. The ages of the bonsai masterpieces in this book range from more than one thousand years to less than ten, showing that the actual age is not as important as the beauty and illusion of antiquity.

Dr. Singer is the only person to have photographed select bonsai from the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum in Sataima City, Japan, and the Shunka-en Bonsai Museum in Tokyo, as well as numerous other masterpieces

trained by Japan's greatest bonsai artists. Additionally, he traveled around the United States to capture many of the finest bonsai specimens to be found in the country. Bringing together the assemblage of bonsai was no small feat, and the bonsai world is indebted to Dr. Singer and the publisher for producing this beautiful book celebrating bonsai as fine art.

On March 11, 2011, the greatest earthquake to have hit Japan in modern times (and the fifth most powerful known in the world) rattled the region and moved the island of Honshu eight feet (2.4 m) eastward. Subsequently, a tsunami with waves as high as 133 feet (40.5 m), devastated the area. Nearly 16,000 people lost their lives, 6,000 were injured, and some 3,600 remain missing. More than 125,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed. A prominent bonsai artist lost his home and belongings, including three hundred bonsai, many of which were award-winning masterpieces. In an effort to assist the victims of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, the publisher will donate a portion of the proceeds of this book to the Japanese Red Cross Society.

I sincerely hope readers of this book will enjoy the beautiful art photographs as well as the detailed descriptions of the bonsai and perhaps find a heightened appreciation for the art form.

— William N. Valvanis

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Smith:

The book *Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature* gives you the sense of being enjoy for your spare time. You may use to make your capable considerably more increase. Book can to become your best friend when you getting strain or having big problem with your subject. If you can make reading a book *Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature* to be your habit, you can get far more advantages, like add your current capable, increase your knowledge about some or all subjects. You can know everything if you like wide open and read a e-book *Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature*. Kinds of book are a lot of. It means that, science reserve or encyclopedia or other people. So , how do you think about this e-book?

Lawrence Weatherby:

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Steve Diaz:

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Bertha Boone:

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